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ABSTRACT

The wordless picture book is a valued but underused resource for young children, beginning literacy students, and for proficient readers. A survey of teachers indicated that three problems exist: (1) few wordless picture books are available in library collections; (2) teachers do not know how to select quality wordless books; and (3) few teachers consider the variety of instructional uses for wordless picture books. Solutions to these problems include emphasizing in teaching methods courses the value of wordless picture books, listing guidelines for selecting quality wordless picture books, and describing an array of teaching ideas for use with wordless picture books. (Twenty-three references, the survey instrument used, and a 225-item bibliography of wordless picture books compiled by the Library Media Specialists of the Oklahoma State Department of Education are appended.) (RS)

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An Array of Teaching Ideas Using Wordless Picture Books

Presenters: Dr. Shirley C. Raines, Associate Professor, Education Curriculum and Instruction, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA 22030 and Dr. Rebecca Isbell, Associate Professor, Human Development and Learning, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN 37614

This paper was presented on April 22, 1988, in Salt Lake City, Utah, at the Association for Childhood Education International Annual Study Conference.

Abstract

According to the presenters' research, the wordless picture book is a valued but underused resource. The presenters make recommendations for an array of teaching ideas for young children, for beginning literacy students, and for proficient readers based on a review of studies, suggestions from children's literature experts, and descriptions of teachers using wordless picture books effectively.

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An Array of Teaching Ideas Using Wordless Picture Book

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This paper was presented on April 22, 1988, in Salt Lake City, Utah, at the Association for Childhood Education International Annual Study Conference.

In this presentation, we reviewed the opinions of experts in children's literature, highlighted a few research studies, discussed our survey of teachers concerning the availability, selection, and use of wordless picture books, and finally made recommendations for young children, for beginning literacy students, and for proficient readers. We ended our presentation by distributing a copy of the survey instrument used in our study and a bibliography of wordless picture books developed by the Library Media Specialists from the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Authorities in the fields of children's literature, language arts, and visual literacy advocate using wordless picture books for many reasons, but the often quoted reasons are: 1) our society is visually-oriented (Sinatra 1987); 2) wordless books rely on the active nature of perception (Gibson 1966); and 3) wordless books allow creative variations in the story (Stewig 1987). Televison obviously is a given in our society, but one only has to maneuver around a city to see the bombardment of visual messages one is asked to interpret just to get from one place to another to realize the pervasiveness of

visual messages. The fact that we are a visually-oriented society is widely accepted.

Sinatra defines visual literacy as the "active reconstruction of past visual experience with incoming visual messages to obtain meaning (1987)." The wordless picture book provides access to a meaning message for children who may not have the reading abilities to enjoy stories in their print form (Stewig 1987). However, it is incorrect to assume that only limited reading ability students enjoy wordless picture books (Larrick 1976). The very nature of visual perception, which Gibson describes as a "process of exploring, seeking out, and responding in continual interaction between viewer and environment," allows the reader of the wordless picture book access to a meaningful story. Meaningfulness, however, is a function of the "information extracted by an active perceiver and the resulting analysis and redirection of search schema develop as a function of the observer's previous experiences with the environment (Murch 1983)." Different readers/viewers of wordless picture books interpret them in a variety of ways based on their previous experiences. There may be subtle differences or profound differences in interpretation among readers. The same reader may choose to read the wordless book in more than one way. As one six year old said to the researcher, "Do you want to hear me read it again? I can do it another way, too." It is the variations in interpretations of the story which makes the wordless picture book a creative medium.

Several researchers in early education have used wordless picture books as devices in their research and with findings which have implications for practitioners. For example, Nurss, Hough and Goodson

(1981) studied the prereading/language development of children in two day care centers and used wordless picture books to stimulate story language. They suggested revisions in the center curriculum for children to be active constructors of stories rather than passive consumers. In another Nurss and Hough project (1985), the researchers studied the effects of task on young children's oral language and recommended that teachers use wordless picture books as one tool to develop the concept of story.

Fran Lehr has stated that "one of the most effective ways to promote children's reading and writing skills is to help them develop a 'sense of story' (1987)." Lehr used the term "story schema" to mean " the mental representations an individual has of the story parts and their relationships." Applebee (1978) writing about the child's evolving concept of story found that kindergartners could use story structure to create their own stories. While Nurss, Hough and Goodson (1981) found little evidence of well-developed story structures among their populations in two day care centers, they recommended the wordless book as a device to help develop story structures.

According to Mary Jett-Simpson who used the wordless picture book in a study of inferential comprehension with kindergarteners, second and fourth graders, a well-developed sense of story structure calls for the child to make inferential responses (1976). In the implications for the study, she suggested that activities which are "interactive constructive" allow for inferential thinking and may facilitate development in this thinking skill. Teachers recognize the value of inferential and higher level thinking in reading comprehension. Flatley and Rutland have used wordless picture books

successfully with linguistically/culturally different students to aid in higher level thought processes as deducing the main idea (1986).

Experts in children's literature, researchers, and practitioners describing teaching strategies have recommended the use of wordless picture books. Why then, with these experts' opinions and researchers' recommendations, did we find little use of the wordless picture book in actual classroom practice? This question was one we researched through a survey of preschool and elementary teachers. Preliminary findings indicated three problems: 1) few wordless picture books were available in library collections; 2) teachers did not know how to select quality wordless books; and 3) few teachers considered the variety of instructional uses for wordless picture books.

While we as researchers can do little to increase the availability of wordless books in library collections, we can in our roles as teacher educators include more information about wordless picture books in methods courses for language arts, reading, and children's literature in the hope that prospective teachers and librarians will build the elementary schools' collections. In addition, by making presentations at conferences, we have found practicing educators eager for information about wordless picture books and committed to upgrading their collections after learning of the extensive possibilities for their use.

To address the second finding in our research study concerning teachers not knowing how to select quality wordless picture books, we have suggested to teachers that they follow Stewig's recommendation to examine wordless picture books in much the same manner as they review other books to determine the qualities of the story and the

illustrations (1987). (At this point in the presentation, the participants were asked to volunteer some of the ways they examine books for story and illustration quality. Building upon the volunteers' responses, the presenters elaborated and summarized with the following points to review wordless picture books for story quality and illustration quality.)

Story quality -

1. Examine the book and determine if it is a concept book or a story book. Concept books, as Donald Crews' TRUCK (1980) and Brian Wildsmith's CIRCUS (1970) present a collection of illustrations organized around a concept and are appropriate at the labeling stage and for vocabulary development. The reader simply labels what is seen in the pictures. The story wordless picture book follows a main character or characters through actions to a satisfactory ending.
2. Choose concept books which intrigue the reader by the nature of the idea. Likewise, choose storybooks which intrigue by the nature of the problem to be solved by the main character or characters.
3. Determine which facets of the book capture the imagination, the plot, the setting, an unusual character or unusual series of

events which happen to a usual character with whom the children can identify.

4. Review the wordless book for the ease of following the actions in the story.
5. Speculate about one of your brightest children's responses to the storyline in the wordless book, then look at the book and consider a less able student's reactions.

Illustrations quality -

1. Remember three key words, "simplicity, complexity and predictability."
2. Turn the pages and follow the main character(s). Can the reader follow the storyline without losing the visual image of the main character(s) in a barrage of visual details?
3. Examine the illustrations for complexity. Are the illustrations complex enough to support the actions of the main character(s) and convey their relationships to each other and to their problem to be solved, or the plot?
4. Review for predictable actions and characterizations. Stop after viewing a few pages and predict what will happen next. Is your prediction confirmed and if it is not, is the surprise turn of

events easy to identify and follow throughout the story?

The third preliminary finding of our study was that teachers do not realize the variety of instructional uses of wordless picture books. To faciliate that understanding, we separated the array of uses into three categories: 1) teaching ideas for young children; 2) teaching ideas for beginning literacy students; and 3) teaching ideas for proficient readers. The ideas listed below under each category are followed by a few descriptions of teachers who value and use wordless picture books.

Teaching Ideas for Young Children - Ask the student to:

1. Label pictures in concept books.
2. Tell actions on each page.
3. Dictate story to teacher or parent volunteer.
4. Write caption from action page.
5. Create sequence pictures for own wordless picture book.
6. Pretend dialogue with a partner.
7. Role play favorite scenes.
8. Tape record different versions of the story.

By using the teaching ideas listed above, the teacher can analyze easily the language development of the child and evaluate the child's use of story structure. For example, during center time, one Head Start teacher assisted individual children at the labeling stage of development in examining concept books in the library corner. One of

the children's favorites was Loretta Lustig's THE POP-UP BOOK OF TRUCKS (1974). For more mature language users, she encouraged verbal composition of stories and helped the children to first practice following the action of the main character throughout the story, then she requested their storytelling. One of their favorites was Peter Wezel's THE GOOD BIRD (1964).

A kindergarten teacher selected wordless picture books with clear emotional overtones with which her children could identify. For example, youngsters eager to prove their physical prowess identified with the little boy in Martha Alexander's BOBO'S DREAM (1970) and the children who are frightened by new experiences related to Emily McCully's FIRST SNOW (1985) and those who were seeking friends at school appreciated Eric Carle's DO YOU WANT TO BE MY FRIEND? (1971). She found she could better evaluate their language development and sense of story structure when she matched the developmental needs of her students and the underlying emotional appeal of the books.

Teaching Ideas for Beginning Literacy Students - Ask the children to:

1. Select one character and describe actions.
2. Write captions for key action pages.
3. Create new ending in written form.
4. Retell story to a small group.
5. Tell a group story.
6. Write character descriptions, emphasize adjectives.
7. Identify similarities and differences between characters.

8. Select a character and write a new adventure.
9. Focus on improvisation and create dialogue.
10. Draw a cognitive map of the story.

After using wordless picture books throughout the school year, one group of first graders enjoyed telling group stories by imagining the conversations between characters. For instance, in Mercer Mayer's A BOY, A DOG, AND A FROG (1967), three children played the characters and invented something for their character to say for each page of the story. In a second grade class where several different languages and cultures were represented, the children used both their languages to tell stories. One Hispanic girl tape recorded her two versions of Jan Omerod's MOONLIGHT (1982). The perceptive teacher then selected key Spanish words from the child's story and taught them to the entire class with the aid of the pictures from the wordless book.

Teaching Ideas for Proficient Readers - Ask the student to:

1. Write imagined characterization by placing the character in another setting.
2. Role play new scenes to add to a wordless book.
3. Add a character and retell the story.
4. Discuss how cause and effect are shown visually.
5. Draw a talking mural with add-on scenes from each child in a small group.
6. Tape record a variety of versions of wordless books to give to younger children.

7. Create a wordless book and read it to younger children.
8. Find wordless books to accompany social studies themes or eras.
9. Display a series of wordless books by the same author.
10. Analyze author's effective use of visual literacy.

A fifth grade teacher chose ANNO'S BRITAIN (1982) to compare her slides of modern life in England to Mitsumasa Anno's version of an earlier period. The rich detail of his drawings inspired some intricate artwork from her students. Inevitably, because Anno is a prolific writer/illustrator of wordless books, the children began comparing what he did differently in his books for younger students than in books for their agegroup. A fourth grade teacher captured the imaginations of her students when she displayed a collection of John S. Goodall's wordless books. The Edwardian style drawings did not interest them at first until they hypothesized what Porky Pig, the cartoon character, would do if he met Paddy Pork, the wordless picture book hero. This simple connection persuaded them to add accents and humor to their verbal renditions of the story inferred in the illustrations.

In conclusion, we presented the wordless picture book as a valued but underused resource. We analyzed why the wordless book often escapes use even among teachers who say they value them. Survey data from our research indicated three problems: 1) few wordless picture

books were available in library collections; 2) teachers did not know how to select quality wordless books; and 3) few teachers considered the variety of instructional uses for wordless picture books. We addressed these problems by: 1) recommending an emphasis in methods courses on the value of wordless picture books; 2) listing guidelines for selecting quality wordless picture books; and 3) describing an array of teaching ideas for young children, for beginning literacy students, and for proficient readers.

We are indebted to our student teachers and graduate students who are practicing educators for field testing these teaching ideas and for insisting that children throughout the elementary school enjoy the wordless picture book if teachers use this instructional tool with enthusiasm. Through this presentation, we hope that we have expanded your vision of the possibilities for wordless picture books; then your creative teaching ideas will multiply.

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Attachments:

Survey Instrument, "Availability, Selection, and Use of Wordless Picture Books"

Bibliograpy of Wordless Picture Books Compiled by the Library Media Specialists of the Oklahoma State Department of Education

Attachment p. 14 QUESTIONNAIRE

AVAILABILITY, SELECTION, AND USE OF WORDLESS PICTURE BOOKS

Please answer the following questions as accurately as possible to reflect the use or non-use of wordless picture books in your teaching.

1. What age children do you teach? _____
2. What grade level do you teach? _____
3. How many years have you been teaching at this grade/age level? _____
4. Do you use wordless picture books in your classroom?

_____Yes. If the answer is yes, please proceed to questions 5, 6, 7.

_____No. If the answer is no, please proceed to question 8.

5. How often do you use wordless picture books in your classroom?

_____Daily, _____Weekly, _____Monthly, _____ 3-5 times a year

6. Please check the way or ways you use wordless books in your teaching.

_____Place them in the library corner for browsing.
_____Teacher use in group time or whole class presentation.
_____Have children tell stories using wordless books.
_____Use for concept teaching.
_____Use to assess language/vocabulary development.
_____Use to assess children's sense of story structure.
_____Use with English as Second Language students.
_____Have children write stories in response to wordless picture books.

Other ways you use wordless picture books in your classroom.

_____

_____

7. Titles or authors of wordless picture books you recall using in your classroom. _____

_____

_____

Use the back of the form if additional space is needed to answer no. 7.

8. If you answered no to question 4, please complete this question. Please check the reason or reasons you do not use wordless picture books in your classroom.

_____Wordless picture books are for children who are not yet readers.
_____There are few or no wordless picture books in our school or center library.
_____There are few or no wordless picture books in my public library.
_____I do not know how to select wordless books for the age children I teach.
_____I do not know how to use wordless picture books.
_____When I used wordless picture books in the past, my students did not respond well.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND INFORMATION.

Please return to your instructor or presenter.

Questionnaire from Dr. Shirley C. Raines, Associate Professor, George Mason University, Dept. of Curriculum and Instruction, 4400 University Dr. Fairfax, VA 22030

Oklahoma State Department of Education
John M. Folks, Superintendent

Library Resources #47
January, 1986

WORDLESS PICTURE BOOKS

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Wordless picture books can be used with the reading program in the following ways:

1. Teach sequencing.
2. Develop reading readiness.
3. Insure a successful reading experience--thus a positive attitude.
4. The child can verbalize a story using his own vocabulary (language competency) as a basis for creating language experience stories.
5. Stimulate imagination.
6. Assess cross-cultural differences in 7 year olds.
7. As creative writing vehicles: Students could compose brief sentence captions for each picture in a wordless book. The captions could be copied on 3 x 5 cards and clipped to the page for independent reading assignments.
8. As a spin-off for dramas, reader's theatre, choral readings, etc.
9. To develop a sense of story structure.
10. To stimulate oral language.

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